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ABSTRACT

In 1946-47 colleges and universities across the nation witnessed an influx of World War II veterans. This was primarily due to the 1944 "G.I. Bill of Rights." This bill allowed any veteran to attend a higher educational institution of his choice with all financial burdens taken care of by the Federal government. As the original bill was extended or revised and new bills for the Korean and Vietnam veterans written, the results of the post-World War II experience were evaluated and considered. In 1969, the silver anniversary of the signing of the original bill, there were again a number of reviews and analyses written. This paper presents a review of the literature pertaining to the first "G.I. Bill" and subsequent bills as related to higher education, veterans, and the public interest. (Author/HS)

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Veterans in College *by Brent Breedin*

In 1946-47, a revolution of sorts began in the United States with the return of World War II G.I.'s. Instead of collecting unemployment compensation or returning to old jobs, a high percentage applied to, and were accepted at, the colleges of their choice. As the original bill was extended or revised and new bills for the Korean and Vietnam veterans written, the results of the post World War II experience were evaluated and considered. In 1969, the silver anniversary date of the signing of the first bill, there were a number of reviews and analyses written on the original bill. Now, as the Vietnam War winds down – with its veteran population already exceeding that of the Korean War [34] – it seems appropriate to review "G.I. Bill" literature related to higher education, veterans, and the public interest.

Higher Education and the G.I. Bills

When the term "G.I. Bill of Rights" was coined in January 1944, its impact on the higher education community was unpredictable. Prepared by the American Legion and introduced in the Senate by J. Bennett "Champ" Clark (D-Mo.) and in the House by John E. Rankin (D-Miss.), the original G.I. Bill as conceived was conservative in its Title III education plan for veterans. It would have provided a year of benefits to those veterans whose education or training had been interrupted by military duty. "At the expiration of that year the Veterans Administrator would choose those to continue for a maximum of three more years." [21]

Shortly after President Franklin Roosevelt signed a liberalized (educational opportunity for all) version of the bill into law on June 22, 1944, an Army survey estimated that veteran participation (return to high school, college, and all other) would be about 7 percent. Earl J. McGrath, a future U.S. Commissioner of Education, forecast that 640,000 veterans would attend college after the war but that "in no academic year will more than 150,000 veterans be full-time students." Though not dealing in numbers, university presidents James B. Conant (Harvard) and Robert M. Hutchins (Chicago) cautioned against lowered standards. Hutchins predicted that colleges and universities would not be able to resist the money represented by veterans. [39]

He may have been right. Administrator of Veteran Affairs Carl R. Gray's "Report on Education and Training under the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, as Amended" in 1950 infers as much:

> There are more than 15,283,000 civilian veterans of World War II. Practically all of these individuals are eligible for education or training under the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, as amended.
>
> The average period of entitlement is 40 months.
>
> More than 9,125,000 or 60 percent, have applied for an original certificate of eligibility and entitlement; 97 percent of these applications have been approved.
>
> More than 6,550,000 have entered training.
>
> More than 87,000,000 months of education and training have been provided.
>
> The cost to the Federal Government for subsistence, tuition, equipment, books, and supplies has already exceeded $8,715,000,000. During fiscal year 1949 alone, the cost was more than $2,700,000,000.
>
> Almost 40,800 educational institutions and more than 500,000 job-training establishments are on the approved list; all but a few (which were approved by the Administrator) have been certified by the appropriate agencies in the several states as qualified and equipped to furnish education or training. . . .
>
> Collegiate enrollment reached a peak of almost 1,158,000 in December 1947. It has declined since then, but 844,000 were in training at the end of November 1949. [24]

The single veteran attending school full time received a living allowance of $50, $65, or $75 per month, while the institution he was attending billed the Veterans Administration up to $500 per academic year (8 to 9 months) for his tuition and fees. An amendment permitting veterans to authorize tuition payments in excess of $500, with a corresponding reduction in their period of entitlement, assured most veterans of free tuition and fees at any school they chose to attend. Private schools with their higher tuition benefitted; state schools in many instances charged veterans more than nonveterans so they could receive a more proportionate share of the federal money; and profitmaking schools opened up by the hundreds to tap the new money source.

In 1952, a special Congressional investigating committee had this to say:

> In view of the waste, abuse, and inefficiency which occurred during the World War II program, it would be grossly unfair to veterans of the Korean conflict, and to the Nation as a whole, to extend the present program without corrective action. Veterans of the Korean conflict are no less entitled to readjustment benefits than veterans of World War II; however, a new group of veterans should not be exposed to the exploitation which has plagued the World War II program. A sound

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> educational readjustment program, unhampered by blind adherence to the past, taking full advantage of the experience gained during the last 7 years should be devised, employing adequate safeguards against abuse to the end that veterans of the present conflict would be entitled to a period of education and training consistent with that period which they may have lost because of service during a period of hostilities. The scholarship allowance should be sufficient to maintain a veteran student under reasonable and normal circumstances in a reliable educational institution with customary charges for nonveteran students used as a guide. [27]

The final recommendation was followed, and Korean veterans were paid $110 monthly while enrolled full time. Out of this sum had to come tuition, fees, and book charges. Legislated in advance of run-away inflation, the payments change was not viewed as a threat to enrollment by most private schools; however, by the time a majority of Korean veterans were deciding which college to attend, their choices had been narrowed to public institutions if finances were a major concern.

Educational benefits under the Cold War and Vietnam G.I. Bill legislated in 1966 followed the Korean pattern – commencing at a $100 monthly rate, jumping to $130 in 1967, and moving to its present $175-per-month rate in 1970. Almost 80 percent of today's veterans attend public institutions, the majority of which are in the 2-year or community college category where tuition is the lowest.

On 9 December 1971, Frederick W. Ness, president of the Association of American Colleges (AAC), testified before the House Committee on Veterans Affairs' Subcommittee on Education and Training and discussed trends:

> The shift of veterans from independent colleges is attributed largely, we believe, to the change in providing benefits from the World War II G.I. Bill system. Veterans are being forced to make higher learning decisions based on economic considerations rather than on educational preferences.
>
> The determinative factor is financial: where our college costs have at least tripled (300 percent) in the last 25 years at 90 percent of our colleges, the federal support of veterans has increased about 30 percent. [15]

Dr. Ness might also have noted another factor in the competition between private and public institutions for students – state assistance to higher education goes almost entirely to the public sector. Such appropriations have climbed from $154 million in 1939-40 (the largest pre-war year) to $500 million in 1949-50; $1,389 million in 1959-60; and $7,004 million in 1970-71 – this last a 45-fold increase over the original figure. [3]

The Veteran and the G.I. Bills

It is generally acknowledged that a sizable minority of those veterans entering college under the original G.I. Bill would not have done so without this aid. Even making allowances for higher education's lean years of 1942-45, the nation's degree production during the 4 peak years of veteran enrollment under the G.I. Bill was more than double that of the best 4 years of pre-World War II production. Degree-credit enrollment percentage figures for age groups 18-21 and 18-24 reached 29.58 and 16.50 respectively in 1949-50 – almost double the prewar peaks of 15.59 and 9.08 in similar age groups in 1939-40 [22]. It was evident that a large percentage of the college-age population was willing to continue its education if the opportunity presented itself. Olson, in his 1968 analysis of the World War II G.I. Bill, described the veteran:

> As a student the veteran was serious, mature, and hard working. Beyond that, the early predictions of what he would be like proved misleading. Almost all studies have concluded that the veteran earned higher grades than did his nonveteran classmate. Thirty percent of all veterans were married and ten percent had children when they started their education, yet these veterans usually earned higher grades than single veterans. A study of the class of 1949 by *Fortune* magazine concluded that contrary to the expectation that veterans would be impatient with authority, "just the opposite" was true. President Conant of Harvard admitted that the veterans were "the most mature and promising students Harvard has ever had." [16]

A study of the performance of some 2,400 veterans attending Brooklyn College from 1946 to 1949 found "that at each point of progression in the college course veterans were doing better than nonveterans" – even though veterans had been admitted with a lower qualifying admissions score than that obtained by nonveterans [8].

The most ambitious study of the World War II veteran on campus was undertaken by the Educational Testing Service in the early 1950s. Examined were the records of 10,000 veterans and nonveteran students in 16 colleges, with the veteran student proving to be a superior achiever. It was also found that students from families whose income was under $2,000 a year did better than the other students whose families earned more. Concluded the authors: "It is hard to escape the impression that the overachieving student is the one who has the most to overcome in the way of economic and social barriers to college." [6]

In an exchange between Senator Claiborne Pell (D-RI) and Frank Newman of Stanford before Pell's Senate Subcommittee on Education (May 26, 1971), Newman pointed to the many differences between the veterans of World War II and today – with one notable exception: "By and large everybody feels that the returning G.I. is a better student and certainly better than he himself would have been had he gone directly from high school." [32] While there appears to be little research on the Vietnam veteran's performance in the classroom, a study of 92 veterans at the University of Illinois in 1963, 1964, and 1965 indicated that the veteran outperformed his nonveteran counterpart by a significant margin [17].

United States Senate hearings in 1969 and 1971 on today's use – or nonuse – by the veteran of his educational benefits resulted in a liberalization of benefits and, perhaps more importantly, focused on informing the G.I. of his options months, not minutes, before he becomes a veteran [29, 30].

In October of 1969 a Conference on the Separating Serviceman was held at the National War College in Washington to cope with some of these same problems. Of particular interest was the panel discussion on education that reviewed the opportunities available to the Vietnam veteran and the techniques for communicating them. [32]

One of the many programs which have sprung up to meet the needs of the Vietnam veteran is at Webster College in St. Louis, Missouri. There the Veterans' Accelerated Learning for Teaching (VAULT) program, initiated in 1968-69, trains the disadvantaged (primarily Negro veterans who would not normally attend college) to teach in ghetto elementary schools. Its purpose is not only to serve the veteran by making allowances for his unpreparedness for college or general lack of motivation but also to provide "father figure" teachers in ghetto schools and educated leadership in minority societies [36]. The Council of the Great City Schools (Washington) has sponsored similar programs in seven other cities [12].

In 1971 the Veterans Administration developed a profile based on an extensive survey made of all VA health care facilities in late 1970 by the Vietnam Era Veterans Committee of the Department of Medicine and Surgery. Five characteristics were identified as making today's veteran different from his predecessors:

1. An assertive response to authority – The young veteran feels strongly that he has the right to know about things that affect him and to have a voice in them.
2. Expectation that authority will *not* be responsive to his intense need to be treated as an individual.
3. Uncertainty and lack of optimism about life, with a resultant absence of direction of goals.
4. An intense positive identification with his own age group.
5. A tendency toward both impatience and impulsivity . . . the exercising of less control over emotions and feelings. [35]

A general awareness of these characteristics by several organizations has resulted in considerable guidance to the Vietnam veteran considering college. The National League of Cities and the U.S. Conference of Mayors have been active in producing a booklet, "Getting It All Together," which tells the veteran in simple language and through charts and tables exactly how he can finance his way through college by using not only the G.I. Bill but also various other government programs [14]. The National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges recently devoted an issue of its research newsletter *FYI* (December 6) to programs on its member campuses designed for returning veterans [13].

As for the veteran of the future, Major General Linton S. Boatwright, director of individual training, U.S. Army, recently outlined the Army's ambitious education goals. [2]

The Public Interest and the G.I. Bills

Congressional concern about the veteran and higher education had to be tied to the public interest before the original G.I. Bill could be passed into law. Olson identified such public interest in his analysis of the bill:

> The uncertainties of reconversion from war to peace, made more pronounced by memories of the depression that preceded the war, and the twin feelings of gratitude and fear people exhibited toward the veteran, motivated the passage of the G.I. Bill. [16]

Since its passage, the G.I. Bill has proved to be in the public interest in ways not anticipated by its sponsors.

Babbidge and Rosenzweig wrote in 1962 that the G.I. Bill is one of the "very few events in social life that can truly be called unprecedented . . . a social experiment on the grand scale." [1]

Emens in 1965 looked at "a new generation of Americans – many of them sons and daughters of G.I. Bill-educated veterans – who are taking their first steps in higher education. . . . For as the rich attainments of the G.I. Bill have shown, education begets education." [4]

Yoder in 1963 did a study of 1,000 G.I. Bill-educated veterans appearing in the 1960-61 *Who's Who in America*. All were under 46 years of age, and 20 percent indicated that they likely would not have continued their education after World War II had it not been for the G.I. Bill. [39]

Johnson in 1970 made similar observations about the G.I. Bill's success and followed with statistical data suggesting that the government's G.I. Bill costs will be repaid as much as eight times by the college-educated veteran in the form of additional income taxes paid over and above what he would have paid if he possessed only a high school diploma. [10]

Another area in which the public interest has been and is being served is in providing guidelines for the financing of higher education for all. Here two schools of thought prevail: (1) that anyone with desire and ability can go to college today and (2) that money will entice into college talented students who might otherwise not attend. [7] In a 1963 study on financial aid to students, West concludes:

> If financial aid will influence a student in the selection of the institution he will attend and his major field of study, then it must be assumed that it will also have an influence on students who could attend college with aid but who could not without. [37]

A return to the original G.I. Bill approach is being recommended by individual members of Congress as well as the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education. [11]

Conclusion

The evolution of the first G.I. Bill and its successors, coupled with reviews of college, veteran and the public's experiences in connection with the Bill, is described in a number of documents in addition to those previously cited [9, 19, 20, 28, 33]. While a quarter of a century has passed since the initial, major participation by veterans in the program, it seems apparent that the country has both succeeded and failed in its efforts to benefit. For example:

1. In spite of the tremendous boost given higher education by the G.I. Bill, enrollment hopes and expectations expressed by the President's Commission on Higher Education in 1947 fell far short in 1960 and are only today nearing its 49 percent college attendance goal [18, 23]. In 1972-73, the Veterans Administration will be spending more money for education than at anytime since the conclusion of World War II – twice as much as the U.S. Office of Education is scheduled to spend on higher education in 1972-73 [5]. With the help of private and public colleges alike, such spending helped revolutionize the country a quarter century ago. Under the present terms of the G.I. Bill, the private college is being forced to forego this new challenge as represented by a different veteran.

2. Veterans of today, like the veterans of World War II, are more educable than most people believed possible. As a group, however, they are not as goal-oriented as their predecessors and lack an awareness of many of the opportunities available to them. Many national organizations and institutions of higher education are working to bring them into the mainstream of American society, both through encouraging government action and local and individual initiative.

3. Can the experiences of the various G.I. Bills be brought to bear on the problems facing society today? Senator Harrison Williams (D-NJ) wrote in 1968:

> In Jefferson's agrarian society, land ownership was the ideal in the "pursuit of happiness," and when one parcel of land was worn out, people had to move on. Today a parcel of education is the ideal possession, and when people find themselves on a worn out foundation, they must move on to more education. [38]

Many members of Congress, scholars, scientists, business executives, and leaders in every walk of life "moved on to more education" a quarter of century ago. A substantial number would not have except for the virtually free education awaiting them under the G.I. Bill. Thoughtful people have been discussing a peacetime G.I. Bill as far back as 1947. Perhaps, as many of these thoughtful people have stated, some serious research and study of the veteran and his education – or lack of education – over the past 25 years might provide a spark.

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